

## **NORTH CAROLINA TRAILS COMMITTEE**

September 18, 2009  
Conference Call Meeting

### **MINUTES OF THE MEETING**

#### **ATTENDANCE**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Ms. Mary Henderson – Representing Greenways  
Mr. John Jaskolka – Representing Hiking Interests  
Mr. Rodney Johnson – Representing Paddle Trail Interests  
Ms. Claudia Nix – Representing Bicycling Interests  
Ms. Barbara Oslund, Acting Chair – Representing Equestrian Interests  
Mr. Brian Sears – Representing Off-Highway Vehicle User Interests  
Mr. Mike Simpson – Member at Large

**DENR, DPR:** Mr. Lewis Ledford, Director  
Ms. Carol Tingley, Chief of Planning and Natural Resources  
Mr. Darrell McBane, State Trails Program Manager  
Mr. Vincent T. Newman-Brooks, Grants Manager  
Ms. Ann Coughlin, Coastal Region Trails Specialist  
Mr. Tim Johnson, Mountain Region Trails Specialist

**GUESTS:** Ms. Kate Dixon, Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail

#### **I. Call to Order and Opening Remarks**

Acting Chair Barbara Oslund called the meeting to order and welcomed all attendees. The conference call meeting began at 9:00 a.m.

#### **II. Approval of Minutes from the April 17, 2009 Meeting**

Mary Henderson requested that reference made to the American Tobacco Trail as AAT be changed to ATT.

**Motion** - A motion was made by Claudia Nix to accept the April 17, 2009 minutes with the correction noted above. Mike Simpson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

### **III. Reports**

#### **North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation**

**Lewis Ledford**, Director of the North Carolina Division of Parks and Recreation welcomed all attendees and thanked committee members for agreeing to this conference call meeting, noting the state budget challenges. Lewis provided the following remarks:

Like all other state agencies, the Division of Parks and Recreation experienced the difficult reductions forced by the current economic conditions. They included cuts incurred during the end of the 2008-2009 fiscal year, significant reductions in appropriations and staffing levels in the new 2009-2011 budget approved by lawmakers and dramatically lower levels of collections in the Natural Heritage and Parks and Recreation trust funds.

After the new administration took charge in early 2009, the division, like other state agencies, was directed to absorb a 10 percent budget cut. Since half the fiscal year had passed, this amounted to a 20 percent reduction.

As you have likely read, things got tighter as the June 30 close of the fiscal year drew near. Unfortunately, this created the perfect storm for state parks. The end of the fiscal year coincides with the start of our visitor season, the time when we need to be able to hire seasonal staff, repair and cleanup facilities to provide for a quality visitor experience.

I don't want to get bogged down in the details, but we were extremely hamstrung in our ability to hire temporary staff and all parks needed to go through multi-levels of approvals for basic expenditures to keep the parks operating.

In addition, in the new budget, the division lost 39 positions from existing permanent staff and planned and anticipated new staff to operate new visitor centers, like those at Fort Macon, Merchants Millpond and others and to operate expanded areas like those at the Gorges and Lake James. The total reductions for the new fiscal year total \$3 million, or about 10 percent.

But I definitely don't want to focus on the negative. Our state's leadership had the foresight and wisdom to keep the trust funds intact and find \$50 million for the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

Specific to the trails program, we were able to retain the Piedmont Regional Trails specialist position. While it does remain frozen due to the budget situation, we are optimistic it will be released for hiring when conditions improve.

We are still forging ahead with master plans for Haw River, Chimney Rock and Carvers Creek state parks. We just completed the new visitor centers at Merchants Millpond and Fort Macon and similar projects are progressing nicely at Cliffs of the Neuse state parks. I had the great opportunity to recently visit new facilities constructed at the Gorges and Lake James in the west and believe everyone will be very pleased with how they look. Just three weeks ago, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund Board approved \$7.5 million for some terrific local government projects and two weeks ago, the division was awarded \$3.9 million from the Natural Heritage Trust Fund board to support key land acquisitions. Recent grant awards from this very group has also received very positive media attention recently.

In addition, our efforts in conservation and responsible natural resources stewardship are being recognized at a national level. The Morton family received an award from the National Association of State Park Directors for the permanent preservation of Grandfather Mountain and the North Carolina state parks system is one of four finalists for the NRPA Gold Medal Award.

As you can see we are still making great strides, made possible with the support of the trust funds, appointed and elected officials, the land trusts, concerned citizens and partners such as NCTC.

Lewis thanked the members of the North Carolina Trails Committee for their continued efforts to guide the department, division and the State Trails Program as we continue to promote, acquire land, develop and manage trails across North Carolina.

### **Committee Member Reports**

**John Jaskolka** provided the following report:

The Weetok Trail in Carteret County has been improved with more bridges and boardwalks. The Neusiok Trail was badly damaged by the heavy rain and wind storm with much of the beach area eroded and several bridges washed out. The trail is now usable as work continues. Location/direction signs are being installed at strategic locations. The Neusiok has been measured with a wheel and found to be 22.08 Miles long with 1.49 Miles of bridge or boardwalk, much thanks to AAT Grants.

John noted an added attractions to the trail this time of year is the Golden Orb Spiders with their yellow webs and Writer Spiders which are all along and across the trail with webs as long as 20 feet or more.

**Claudia Nix** provided the following report:

I attended the Bicycle Haywood County Bike Committee and have helped them make connections with the Region 14 DOT District Engineer and the MPO.

I sat on the committee to help the French Broad MPO work on updating the Priority Needs List for projects to be entered into the SPOT list.

As a member of the Buncombe County Greenway Commission we finished interviewing all the groups who applied to develop the 11 mile Greenway Plan along the Hwy 70 and Swannanoa Valley which will connect the Wilma Dykeman Greenway to the Point Lookout Greenway. We chose Equinox/McGill to do the plan and they officially began work on Thursday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

The Bicycle/Pedestrian Task Force is participating in the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Counting project Sept 8-12<sup>th</sup>. We have about 50 sites where the counts will be taken. The students from Western NC University will be helping us to tally and evaluate the findings before we send them on to the National Traffic Engineers and Alta Planning Group. This information will help Asheville with baseline data for our facilities and usage and help the group develop data to be used in planning on a national basis.

We have been trying to deal with the local incident of an Asheville Firefighter shooting a bicycling father with a child on the back of his bike. I've been interviewed by the Asheville Citizen Times, and the WLOS-TV several times about it. A small group of cyclists held a protest in front of the fire department because they were upset about how it was handled. They commented that they were not protesting the fire department. I commented that I felt it was more an issue of someone with a control problem rather than a motorist vs bicyclist issue. We had 2 other road rage incidents within weeks of each other which has the whole community on edge.

We have made arrangements to show the Illinois League of Bicyclists video on sharing the road to be shown on the Buncombe County access channel. Several individuals in our group have written letters to the editor in an effort to counter the very negative letters which have appeared about cyclists after the shooting incident. These are just as disconcerting as the incident.

We held another bike corral(vale parking for bikes) for the After 5 concert and the Lexington Arts Festival.

I team taught a Traffic Skills 101 class for 8 people this last month and have been involved in a new ride program through the Blue Ridge Bike Club called the “Guided Rides”. These are short easy rides of 8-15 miles in length, we spend time giving information on appropriate riding skills, riding techniques and etiquette in an effort to give folks some confidence and learn where to ride. The rides have been held weekly since July and are averaging about 15 people each time.

**Barbara Oslund** provided the following report about the efforts of the North Carolina Horse Council:

- Continuing to work with the Yadkin Valley Trail Riders to resolve access issues at the Basin Creek parking area adjacent to Thurman Chatham Game lands and Doughton Park on the Blue Ridge Parkway in Wilkes County. The group will also be involved with horse trail issues at Stone Mountain State Park.
- The Blue Ridge Horseman’s Association announced August 1 the successful execution of a lease with N. C. State University for 375 acres of the old 4-H Camp Anita-Alta in Caldwell County. NCSU allowed BRHA to work as volunteers this summer to complete some of the cleanup projects as well as converting the camp over to a horse friendly campground before the lease was signed. BRHA logged nearly 800 man hours of labor and with equipment use and donations of materials invested almost \$13,500 into this property. BRHA met with the U.S. Forest Service concerning adding a connecting trail to their Boone's Fork trail system. BRHA is helping the USFS with GPS mapping of the trails and upgrading trail markers.
- Sauratown Trails Association has done a preliminary field review of eroding sections of the Sauratown Trail and discussed possible remedies. Several miles of trail were walked during a heavy rain storm which highlighted the most severe drainage problems. STA has received a \$50,000 State RTP grant for remediation of these conditions.
- Planned the fourth Trail Master Certification Course, which will be held at Uwharrie National Forest September 24 to 27, 2009 and funded by a State RTP educational grant. A Special Use permit application was needed to hold the trail work portion of the course in the Forest, and the classroom sessions will be held at 4B Farm in Eldorado. The course is nearly full.
- Made several written contacts with Congress urging re-authorization and enhancement of the Recreational Trails Program (RTP), in cooperation with the Equestrian Land Conservation Resource and the American Horse Council.
- Prepared and submitted comments on the Uwharrie National Forest Management Plan.
- Working with Durham County about keeping sections of the American Tobacco Trail open to equestrian use, also maintaining contact with the Open Space staff about other opportunities.
- Initiating discussions about the possibility of trails near Hyco or Mayo Lake or elsewhere in Person County.

- Continuing the support for equestrian trails at Eno River State Park. Members of the trails committee and Falls Lake Trail Riders met with the Park Superintendent to discuss equestrian trails. One tract of land is still needed to make the trails possible. The Eno River Association is taking the lead on land acquisition. Held a June fundraising concert to support equestrian and hiking trails at Eno River State Park.
- Added equestrian trails to the environmental assessment document for the Northwest Community Park in Chatham County. Trails committee representatives Barb Oslund and Jim Bell attended the July Southeastern Equestrian Trails conference in Gainesville FL. Many trail topics were covered, but the overall theme was sustainability and the “greening” of the horse industry. There were attendees from over 20 states.
- There are a series of state-wide "town hall" meetings about the recent equine economic study - where & when information below. In addition to the horse community, we are really hoping that land use planners, parks & recreation planners, economic development folks, etc., will attend these meetings.
- Among the interesting facts they will learn - we are a **\$2 billion industry, with approx. 90% of that money spent in NC; and over 70% of that money spent in the resident county.** I think Guilford Co was #2 in the state, Wake Co was up there, and Mecklenburg and counties around Charlotte were in the top 5. Similar to trends in other parts of the US, the biggest equine populations are very near the urban areas - something that may at first seem counter-intuitive.

### **Other Organizations or Guest Reports**

**Kate Dixon**, Executive Director of the Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail (FMST) organization, provided the following Progress Report on the MSTt:

MOUNTAINS-TO-SEA TRAIL MONTH Governor Perdue declared October as the 2<sup>nd</sup> annual MST Month. We’ve organized 37 events statewide to help people get out and explore the trail at this beautiful time of year. You can search the calendar of events at [www.ncmst.org/mstmonth.html](http://www.ncmst.org/mstmonth.html).

Great Smoky Mountain National Park Tim Johnson has been working with GSMNP on possibly rerouting the trail through the park so that we avoid a section of the Blue Ridge Parkway where topography and rare plants have prevented trail construction.

### **Blue Ridge Parkway**

- Section near Boone – Watauga Tourism Development Authority donated \$20,000 to allow FMST to hire professional crews to build a particularly steep section where we were concerned about rock falling onto the Parkway
- Section from NC 16 to US 421 in South Ashe County is almost complete. FMST plans to ask that this section be dedicated in October 2010.

Guilford County The County and State have completed acquisition of two tracts totaling 440 acres that will help extend the trail from the Greensboro watershed lakes to the Haw River State Park. County staff will be leading an MST Month hike on this land on Saturday, October 3. They plan to begin a public process to plan the trail system soon.

Orange County The Board of Commissioners are to start the process for adopting the proposed trail route in October 2009.

Eno River State Park FMST is starting trail construction at the park on Saturday, October 3.

Falls Lake Eleven new miles of trail are to be dedicated on Saturday, October 24.

Clayton and NCDOT are working to acquire all the land and easements to extend the trail an additional three miles beyond the new 330-acre tract acquired by State Parks last winter. NCDOT then hopes to use federal stimulus money to construct the trail.

Kinston hired a graduate student intern to develop a detailed plan for the trail route through downtown Kinston.

New Bern The Board of Aldermen approved a new route through the city on September 8<sup>th</sup>. They will be coming to NCTC next meeting for official designation of the route.

#### **IV. Business**

Darrell McBane provided information on the following business items:

##### **A. Update on 2009-2010 Adopt-A-Trail Grant Recommendation**

The 2009-2010 Adopt-A-Trail grant funding recommendations were held by the Division of Parks and Recreation until the State budget was approved. Funding for the Adopt-A-Trail Grant Program is included in the next biennium budget. We were notified on September 2<sup>nd</sup> to forward award letters and to work with the Division of Purchase and Services for the award of contracts.

##### **B. 2010-2011 Adopt-A-Trail Grant Application Package**

The draft 2010-2011 Adopt-A-Trail Grant Application Package and scoring system were discussed. The committee agreed to change the AAT scoring system as follows:

Brochures, website information, promotional media and trail signs – score 5 points

New trail construction – score 4 points

Trail renovation or restoration – score 3 points

Trail-side facilities – score 2 points

Also, under the “Trail Will Be Open to the Public” question, the reference to “Open by invitation only” was eliminated.

**Motion** – Mary Henderson made a motion to accept the 2010-2011 Adopt-A-Trail Grant Application Package and Scoring System as submitted with the corrections noted above. Rodney Johnson seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

#### C. Recreational Trails Program Updates

**2009 Federal Highway Recessions** - We received e-mail notification from Christopher Douwes with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) that the FHWA has notify the States that \$8,708,000,000 of unobligated Federal-aid highway funds apportioned to States will be rescinded on September 30, 2009. North Carolina’s share of this total is \$249,216,507. This information also suggests that cuts could be taken from all federally funded Highway Programs including the Recreational Trails Program (RTP). The suggested maximum cut to the RTP was \$472,313. The information reads as if NCDOT can decide how to make up its recessions. We are working through our contacts with NCDOT Grant and Aid Section and are told that we have no un-obligated RTP funds. Let’s hope this continues to be true.

We have talked with Rob Ayers, our FHWA contact in the Raleigh office and we have agreed to suggest that Secretary Dee Freeman hold 2009 RTP award letters until after the September 30, 2009 deadline for responding to the FHWA Recession Notice. When we know how NCDOT has responded, we can then take appropriate action.

**2010 RTP Reauthorization Efforts** - Christopher Douwes, our contact with the Federal Highway Administration stated “The Federal-aid Highway Program Reauthorization act for 2009 does not provide funding for the RTP, Transportation Enhancement (TE) Activities, or Scenic Byways, but it also does not eliminate these programs. Under this proposal, the programs would continue to exist but would not be specifically funded through the Federal Highway Trust Fund; they would depend on General Fund appropriations.”

#### D. Update on 2009 Recreational Trails Program Grant Recommendations

DENR has approved the 2009 RTP grant recommended forwarded by the Division of Parks and Recreation. DENR will delay the sending of award letters until after September 20, 2009 when we know how NCDOT has responded to the FHWA



Recession Notice. If RTP is left untouched, DENR will send the award letters and staff will begin to work with the Division of Purchase and Services for the Award of Contract.

E. 2010 Recreational Trails Program Grant Application Package

The 2010 Recreational Trails Program Grant Application Package and scoring system was discussed. A paper copy of the application will be available and will mirror the text of the online RTP application.

**Motion** – Claudia Nix made a motion to accept the 2011 Recreational Trails Program Grant Application Package and Scoring System as submitted. John Jaskolka seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

F. Potential Online RTP and AAT Applications

We are working with DPR's Information Technologies staff to upgrade our grants management database – and a result is the ability for applicants to complete their applications online. This will allow us to work with the applicants to correct/modify applications, eliminate data entry errors, and to transfer data directly into the new data management system.

The committee members were directed to the division's website where a test version of the RTP application is available for review. The committee members noted their appreciation to staff for updating the grant database system and for making the RTP and AAT grant applications available online.

G. FMST 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009 Chainsaw Certification Training RTP – **Action Item**

The Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail organization have applied for a second 2009 RTP Safety/Education grant in the amount of \$2,100 to hire a professional to teach chainsaw safety to members and others in need of chainsaw certification. This certification is required to work in the NPS, USFS and State Park lands. A copy of this application was attached to the 7-31-09 e-mail along with the draft meeting agenda.

**Motion** – Mike Simpson made a motion to recommend funding for the Friends of the Mountains To Sea Trail 2009 RTP Safety/Education grant in the amount of \$2,100. Rodney Johnson seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Note: John Jaskolka abstained from voting as he is a member of the FMST.

H. NC State Parks application for 2009 RTP Safety/Education Grant

NC State Parks has applied for a 2009 RTP Safety/Education Grant in the amount of \$500.00 to contract a professional trail builder to conduct a state of the art trail construction and maintenance workshop during the 2009 NC State Parks Superintendent's Conference.

**Motion** – Mary Henderson made a motion to recommend funding for the NC State Parks 2009 RTP Safety/Education Grant. Mike Simpson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

I. 2009 Trails Related General Assembly Bills

House Bill 86 - OHV Registration & OHV Trust Fund Bill – Did not become law but can be considered in 2010 Short Session because it is tied to finance.

House Bill 1120 - AAT Increase Funding Bill – Did not become law but can be considered in 2010 Short Session because it is tied to finance.

J. New Regional Trail Planning Efforts

**PTCOG** is now under contract to conduct a regional trails planning effort for 12 counties including: Stokes, Surry, Davie, Davidson, Forsyth, Yadkin, Guilford, Alamance, Randolph, Montgomery, Rockingham and Caswell. The PTCOG is providing information about this effort through an online service at <http://www.myplaninput.com>. If you are interested, just sign in and you can be fully involved in this process.

State Trails Program staff are working with the **Western Piedmont Council of Governments** on their proposal to do a 4 county regional trails plan. These counties including: Caldwell, Alexander, Burke and Catawba.

Staff are also working with **Isothermal Planning and Development Commission** on their proposal to do a 4 county regional trails plan. These counties include: Polk, McDowell, Rutherford and Cleveland.

K. Previous NCTC Votes via E-mail

**Appalachian Trail Conservancy – Chainsaw and Safety Equipment – Yes**  
Unanimous

**Southeastern Watershed Forum – Majority Vote No**  
Specific Vote Tally: Rodney Johnson – No; Brian Sears – No; Mike Simpson – No; John Jaskolka – No; Barb Oslund – No. Claudia Nix and Mary Henderson had reservations about NC being the only state providing RTP Safety/Education funding for this conference.

**Designation Request FMST for an 11-mile segment of the Falls Lake Trail –  
NC50 to Rolling View Recreation Area – Yes Unanimous**

V. Date and Location for the next North Carolina Trails Committee Meeting

April 16, 2010 was selected as the date for the spring NCTC meeting and the location suggested was Edenton or Elizabeth City.

VI. Adjournment

**Motion** – John Jaskolka made a motion to adjourn at 10:15 a.m. Rodney Johnson seconded the motion which passed unanimously.